

Earth and Environmental Sciences

PROGRESS REPORT 2001–2002



Cover Photograph

Valles Caldera, New Mexico, June 1991—taken during Space Shuttle Mission STS040

The Valles Caldera, a remnant of the former Jemez Volcano, can be seen in this spectacular near-vertical-looking photograph. The caldera is an almost circular, cliff-ringed depression 14 miles (23 kilometers) across with forest-covered upper slopes and canyons. Only the base of the Jemez Volcano now remains. The volcano rose along faults that edged the west side of the Rio Grande Rift, now the Rio Grande Valley (visible to the east and southeast of the caldera). A composite volcano estimated to be about the size and shape of Mount Saint Helens in Washington, Jemez Volcano reached its maximum height 1 million years ago; shortly thereafter, it burst forth with two extremely violent eruptions, spewing out incredible volumes of volcanic gases, ash, pumice, and broken rock. The discharge of volcanic materials by these eruptions is thought to have been 100 times greater than the discharge of the 1980 eruption of Mount Saint Helens. Ash clouds drifted as far east as the area that now comprises Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, and eastern Texas. Other ash sped down the volcano's flanks, leaving great deposits at its base and in the surrounding region. These two massive explosions depleted the magma chamber far beneath the volcano. No longer supported from below, the volcano, ringed by fractures, collapsed, forming a vast caldera. The view of the caldera from one side of the rim to the other is blocked by the great dome of Redondo Peak and numerous smaller domes that squeezed up through circular faults on the edge of the caldera. The remaining level floor of the caldera is a vast grassland that is home to thousands of cattle.

Los Alamos National Laboratory, established in 1942 by the United States Government for atomic research and development of the first atomic bombs, is located on the east slope of the former Jemez Volcano.

Photo courtesy of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Earth and Environmental Sciences Progress Report 2001–2002

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Abstract

This report describes the Earth and Environmental Sciences Division's progress in applied and basic science during calendar years 2001 and 2002. The report presents an overview from the division leader, Paul Weber; group and center descriptions; an update on our facilities; an overview of our patents and license agreements; funding sources and technical staff information; and research summaries of the science and engineering activities of each group within the division—Atmospheric, Climate, and Environmental Dynamics (EES-2), Hydrology, Geochemistry, and Geology (EES-6), Environmental Geology and Risk Analysis (EES-9), Geophysics (EES-11), and Carlsbad Operations (EES-12). It also contains an overview of the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics (IGPP), the University of California's Los Alamos branch in a system of institutes for the study of geophysics and planetary physics. This report also includes highlights of some of our recent technical accomplishments. You may learn more from the cited references and by visiting our Web page at <http://ees.lanl.gov> or by contacting us through the EES Division Office, at (505) 667-3644. ■

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Contents

Division Overview

Earth and Environmental Sciences Division—An Overview	3
<i>Division Review Committee</i>	8

Group and IGPP Overviews

Earth and Environmental Sciences Division Management	11
Atmospheric, Climate, and Environmental Dynamics—EES-2	13
Hydrology, Geochemistry, and Geology—EES-6	15
Geotechnical Engineering Research—EES-7	17
Environmental Geology and Risk Analysis—EES-9	19
Geophysics—EES-11	21
Carlsbad Operations—EES-12	23
Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics—IGPP	25

Research Summaries

EES-2	
<i>Advanced Measurement Capabilities and Their Applications</i>	
<i>to Ecosystem Monitoring</i>	29
<i>Finding the Roles of Ocean Physical and Biogeochemical</i>	
<i>Processes in Global Climate Variation</i>	31
<i>Recent FIRETEC Developments and Applications</i>	33
<i>Assessment of Surface and Near-Surface Hydrologic Processes</i>	
<i>at Technical Area 54</i>	34
<i>Tropical Western Pacific</i>	35
<i>Weapons Phenomenology and Infrasound</i>	37
EES-6	
<i>Hydrogeology of the Pajarito Plateau</i>	38

<i>Tracing Ecologic Processes with Stable Isotopes</i>	40
<i>Three-Dimensional Model of the Española Basin Aquifer</i>	42
<i>Colloid-Facilitated Radionuclide Transport</i>	44
<i>Geochemistry of Carbon Capture and Sequestration</i>	46

EES-7	
<i>Yucca Mountain Saturated-Zone Flow and Transport</i>	48
<i>Data-Management Team Continues to Expand Services</i>	50
<i>Engineered Barrier Systems for the Yucca Mountain Project</i>	51
<i>Yucca Mountain Project Underground Field</i>	
<i>Testing Coordination</i>	53

EES-9	
<i>Geological Elements of the Laboratory's Seismic</i>	
<i>Hazards Program</i>	54
<i>A New Volcano at Yucca Mountain? What is the Risk?</i>	55
<i>Environmental Investigations in Canyons at Los Alamos</i>	56
<i>Advanced Geographic Information System Capabilities</i>	
<i>in Support of EES</i>	57

EES-11	
<i>Microhole Drilling and Instrumentation Technology</i>	59
<i>Subcritical Experiment Containment</i>	61
<i>Seismic Imaging</i>	62
<i>Nonlinear Elastic Waves in Geomaterials</i>	64
<i>Regional Location Calibration in Asia</i>	66
<i>Evaluation of Monitoring Technologies for Nuclear Testing</i>	67

EES-12	
<i>Plutonium-239 in Synthetic Brines After Equilibration</i>	
<i>with Magnesium Oxide Backfill</i>	69
<i>Irradiation of MgCl₂·6H₂O Applying Beam-Line Experiments</i>	70
<i>Synchrotron X-Ray Absorption Spectroscopy Applications in</i>	
<i>Actinide Molecular Environmental Science</i>	72

<i>An Apatite II Permeable Reactive Barrier to Remediate Lead, Zinc, and Cadmium in Acid Mine Drainage</i> . . . . .	.74
<i>Phosphate-Induced Metal Stabilization Remediation of Lead-Contaminated Soil at Camp Stanley</i> . . . . .	.75

IGPP	
<i>Emerging Astrophysical Phenomena</i> . . . . .	.77
<i>Dynamic Science of Earth Processes</i> . . . . .	.79
<i>Complex Dynamical Systems</i> . . . . .	.81
<i>Space Weather Foundations</i> . . . . .	.83
<i>Turbulent Transport and Surface Fluxes of Momentum, Heat, and Mass for Inhomogeneous and Nonstationarity Conditions</i> . . . . .	.85

Analytical and Experimental Facilities

Overview of EES Division's Physical Plant Conditions and Analytical and Experimental Research Facilities89
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Actinide Chemistry and Repository Science Program Capabilities at Los Alamos' Carlsbad Operations and CEMRC92
--	-----

Intellectual Property

Patents and Intellectual Property99
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Appendices

Technical Staff Members by Disciplinary FieldA1
FY2001–02 Average Programmatic Funding Profile	
	.A1
2001–2002 Publications . . . . .	.A2
<i>2002 Journal Articles</i> . . . . .	.A2
<i>2002 Books and Chapters in Books</i> . . . . .	.A5
<i>2001 Journal Articles</i> . . . . .	.A6
<i>2001 Books and Chapters in Books</i> . . . . .	.A8